

Mission and the Theological Crisis of the 80's

MISSIONS AND THE THEOLOGICAL CRISIS OF THE '80S

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The critical issues in missions from mid century to the present have been ones of social structure. The success of the mission movement had led to the planting of churches throughout the world. The question now arose, what should be the relationship of these churches to the missions and sending churches.

During this period colonialism which had served as the framework within which missions operated for close to two centuries collapsed. Political nationalism and cultural pride swept the world, forcing the hand of those reluctant to recognize the autonomy and integrity of churches in different lands.

Changes in relationship between new churches, and missions and sending churches have raised difficult questions. Of the "three selfs" advocated by Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn from the mid-nineteenth century on, the last has been the most difficult to implement. Sending missions were all too happy to see young churches self-supporting and self-propogating. These eased the load on the missions. But self-governing was another matter. By this missions lost their power to control the churches they had established. Self-governance also raised problems for the young churches. Often they were asked to take charge of large institutions which they wanted but could not support.

The social structural problems growing out of the independence of the young churches were many. When should missions turn responsibilities for evangelistic programs, schools and hospitals over to the churches? Who would support these programs? How should missionaries relate to the churches? What was the responsibility of sending churches to unevangelized peoples within the territories of the young churches? How could missions renew their

vision and outreach, and avoid ending up as agencies of inter-church aid? And how could young churches relate to older churches on the international scene as equals and as partners in worship and mission to the world? These and many more structural questions were discussed for countless hours in conferences, churches and committees, and by individuals over countless cups of coffee and tea. The critical issues in missions for the rest of this century will be theological. The maturation of the younger churches has raised the question of a fourth self: self theologizing. In the long run this may prove to be the most difficult to deal with. Certainly it will have a far more profound effect upon the sending churches than have the first three, for now the very foundations of the church itself are being called into question. As theologians in churches around the world have begun to interpret the Gospel within their cultural contexts, several crucial questions have emerged that challenge the assumptions of western theologians. It is our purpose here to look at some of these questions that have emerged from the mission scene in the past decade and that will be the critical issues confronting the international church for the rest of this century.

THE QUESTION OF THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

The age of exploration, trade and missions opened up to the west a world of incredible cultural diversity. Explorers pushed on to the uncharted regions of the world and brought back exotic tales of what they had seen. Missionaries returning to their home churches gave reports and showed slides about the strange customs of the people among whom they lived. For the most part the west did not recognize the significance of this cultural diversity. On the one hand, they did not take other cultures seriously as creations of

human beings like unto themselves. Other cultures could be ignored so long as they were labeled "primitive" and "foreign". On the other hand, many western intellectuals and theologians accepted the common humanity of all peoples and saw cultural diversity as a relatively superficial phenomenon. It was assumed that at core all people lived in the same world and perceived it in more or less the same way. Some, such as western peoples, saw the world more perfectly for what it really was, and other peoples often had false myths and beliefs, but all people certainly lived in the same world and agreed upon the essential nature of reality. In the social sciences this view expressed itself in the theory of unilineal cultural evolution, and in theology in claims for one or another theological system as the comprehensive, unchanging, and absolute truth.

There were, however, missionaries who identified closely with the people they served, who learned their beliefs and customs and respected not only the people as fellow human beings but also the integrity of the cultures as conceptual systems. Many Bible translators, too, became aware of the different worlds implicit in different languages. These missionaries and translators had to come to grips with the implications of cultural diversity, but their message was often not heard in the west. Frequently they could not share their theological insights with their sending churches for fear of being misunderstood and branded as heretical. Western theologians, on the other hand, discounted them as practitioners untrained in the rigors of theological thought.

In the scientific world the advent of intensive anthropological field research shattered the notions of "primitive" cultures. Different cultures were shown to have an internal integrity of their own. Moreover, the idea that after all, all people live in the same world, was called into question. Cultures turned out to be the ways a society of people organize and view their

world. And studies of cultural diversity showed that at the most fundamental levels, people put their worlds together in different ways. As Edward Sapir noted "the worlds people live in are not the same world with different labels attached, they are, in fact, different worlds."

The discovery of the depth of cultural diversity has raised serious questions in the sciences. Is there a common humanity underlying all individuals, societies and cultures, and, if so, in what does it consist? Are there psychological, social and cultural universals? Are there universal laws or principles that apply to all peoples?

In theology, the implications of cultural diversity exploded on the scene with the emergence of theologians in other cultural settings. The rise of African theologies, Latin American theologies, and Indian theologies raised questions of their relationship to western theology, and, more fundamentally, of western theological claims to universal truth and of the very nature of theology itself.

On one level, it has become clear that any theology is an interpretation of the Scriptures and not the Scriptures itself. We must distinguish between the Gospel, the Good News as revealed in scriptures, and our understanding of it. It is not hard to show that any theology is, in part, a product of the culture within which it emerges. Moreover, the more one moves from textual exegesis to biblical theology, to the construction of grand theological systems, the greater the influence of culture. If there are Christian universals, then, they must be rooted first in historical facts, in the record of God's acts on earth, particularly in the person of Jesus Christ. Just as scientists have come to realize that scientific theories are not "facts" but mental models or maps of parts of the world, so theologians must recognize the human context within which theologizing takes place. Every language, every culture and every individual has implicit theological biases and it is impossible for

theologians to extricate themselves from their human context. In a sense modern theology must recognize the "priesthood of all believers" - the fact that each individual will and should interpret the Gospel within his or her setting. Authority rests not in theology, but in the Gospel - in what in fact God has done.

On a second level, it is becoming apparent that, in part, theological diversity is due to the fact that the Gospel is addressing different problems in different cultures. God begins where people are, but He always calls them from there towards the ideals of His Kingdom. The sins of which the Holy Spirit convicts a church seem to depend to some extent upon the cultural setting within which the church lives as well as its state of spiritual maturity. Similarly, the sins of which the individual is convicted ~~or~~ depends in part upon his or her sociocultural context and level of Christian growth.

On a third level, the search for theological universals calls for an understanding of what God is saying to churches in all parts of the earth. Just as no single individual understands the full revelation of God, so no church in one cultural or temporal setting has a complete theology of God's acts. As individuals and churches we may be open to God's voice as it addresses us concerning our conscious sins and failures, but we rarely see the evils that may lie in our unconscious assumptions and acts. It sometimes takes an outsider to point out our hidden faults. On the other-hand, God reveals himself through his Word in different ways to different peoples in different times. Only as we listen to one another can we more fully understand the meaning of the Scriptures for us in our day.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOSPEL AND CULTURE

The growing awareness in missions of other cultures and the depth of cultural variance made missionaries increasingly aware of their own culture. So long as people operate within a single cultural context, they are often unaware of the fundamental assumptions underlying their thoughts and behavior patterns. But as they enter another culture and confront it explicitly at the most fundamental levels of its order, they become aware self-reflexively of their own implicit presuppositions.

But to become aware of one's own cultural premises raises a difficult question. What of what one believes is culture and what is truly Gospel? To say that one's religious beliefs are rooted in the Gospel and other beliefs in culture is too simple. It is not difficult to show that within each culture and, indeed, within each language, there are fundamental religious assumptions and that these have their origins in other than Christian sources. Furthermore, Christianity claims to be more than a set of religious beliefs, it is a total way of life. It has something to say about economic, social, political, legal and aesthetic activities and institutions. Christ speaks of the "Kingdom of God".

Modern missions has raised the question of what then is culture and what is Gospel; and how do the two relate to each other. Richard Niebuhr (1951) sought to answer this question, but his answer tends to be unidimensional. There are at least three dimensions on which we must examine the issue.

The Gospel contra Culture.

First, we must make a distinction between Gospel and culture. The Gospel is God's revelation to humans, and is supracultural. By that we mean that it is not tied to any one culture, but can be adequately expressed in all cultures. Culture, on the other hand, is a human creation that varies from people to people,

and from one time to another. It is the cognitive maps or models by which people order their world.

The early church faced the question of the relationship between Gospel and culture when the Jewish congregations were flooded by Gentiles. So long as the church remained within the Jewish cultural setting the problem did not seriously arise, but when the Greeks began to convert the question arose, did they have to become Jews in their culture in order to join the church? In the first great missionary conference (Acts 15) the church came to the conclusion (among others) that the Gospel is above human cultures, and that it can be translated into different cultural forms. In other words, people do not need to leave their cultures in order to become Christians.

In reality, the distinction between Gospel and culture is often hard to make. Some things are clearly the Gospel, such as our relationship to Jesus Christ. Others are clearly culture, such as the houses we build. But what about wearing clothes, or monogamy, or greeting one another with a holy kiss, or going to war, or women wearing a head covering in church? Do these apply to all Christians in all cultures and ages.

Difficult as it sometimes is to differentiate between Gospel and culture, failure to do so can lead to serious consequences. One of these is our tendency to equate Gospel with our own culture. It is identified with wearing neckties, sitting on pews and singing translated hymns. At a deeper level it is tied to democracy, capitalism and a western world view. But to the extent the Gospel is tied to a particular culture, it becomes foreign to other people, and the missionary becomes an agent of foreign culture change. On a more subtle level, some missionaries and theologians have questioned whether the fullness of the Gospel can be wholly understood by Christians in other cultures. The result is a sense of spiritual superiority and a type of Christian colonialism.

Closely tied to this equation of Gospel and culture is the tendency to develop a civil religion. In the west this would mean that Christianity is used to support free enterprise, nationalism and militarism. We would see our society as God's chosen people, and be convinced that if it falls, God's work on earth would come to an end. But then Christianity is no longer a revealed religion speaking the voice of God. It has become a human religion supporting a particular culture.

Gospel in Culture

Even as we differentiate between Gospel and culture, we must recognize that the Gospel can never be expressed apart from cultural forms. The Bible must be spoken or written in a language, our beliefs expressed in the thought forms and rituals of a culture, and the church organized along the lines of its institutional structures.

Much is made in missions today of concepts such as indigenization and contextualization. These refer to the fact that the Gospel must be expressed within the cultural forms of a people if they are to understand it and believe. So long as it is proclaimed in alien symbol systems, it will often be rejected simply because of its foreignness.

Unfortunately, missionaries have too often introduced (and continue to introduce) the Gospel in western cultural forms. Roughly translated western hymns and music were used rather than indigenous songs, and organs and pianos rather than drums and rattles. New England style church buildings were built rather than open thatch meeting houses. Leadership was entrusted to democratically elected young men rather than to wise elders. Some cultural forms indigenous to other societies may seem strange or even offensive to western Christians, such as bardic or dramatic forms in preaching, or dance in Christian rituals. But if the connotations of these forms within that culture do

not run counter to the Gospel, they can often be used as very effective media for communicating the Good News.

A more serious question raised by contextualization is that of theological diversity. As Christians read and interpret the Bible in different cultures, it speaks to them according to their particular needs and understandings. The result is some variation in theological interpretations. There is, to be sure, a core of the Gospel, such as the Lordship of Christ, salvation by faith and a call to Christian discipleship and koinonia that is constant for all peoples, but even this is often understood in terms of different cultural analogies and symbols.

But theological variance is due not only to differing needs in different cultures, it is also due to the fact that as people read the Bible, they interpret it within their cultural structures. As we have already seen, there are implicit within the structure of every language and culture basic assumptions about the nature of things. As the Gospel is translated into a new language and culture, and as it is read by people within that culture, it is molded to some extent by its cultural container. The result is Christians in different cultures interpret the scriptures in different ways, and we can often learn from their understandings just as we can from other Christians in our home congregations. The constancy of the Gospel is rooted in God's acts in human history culminating in Christ, and the Biblical revelation that bears witness to those acts.

Gospel to Culture

Even as we contextualize the Gospel, we must guard against so contextualizing it that it loses its prophetic call. People need to understand the Gospel, but it calls them to repentance, faith and discipleship.

The Gospel calls for transformations in personal lives. A man may continue to be a husband and father, but he is called to be so in love, seeking the well-being and development of his family rather than himself. A leader may still have power, but he is to use it ^{as} ~~an~~ a servant to minister to others. Salvation is more than belief in certain truths. Even the demons know that Jesus is the Son of God, and they tremble. It is a change of allegiance that expresses itself in changes in life.

The Gospel also calls for transformations in social structures and cultural assumptions. It speaks out against oppressive social institutions that tyrannize the poor. It calls for personal and corporate compassion for marginal people of society - the weak, orphaned, widowed, retarded and crushed. It does so for it affirms the dignity of human beings who are created in the image of God. To be sure, sin has had its effects, but they are still loved by God and recipients of His call to salvation and restored fellowship. But in affirming this view of humans the Gospel challenges other views in cultures that reduce people to animals.

The Gospel is God's message to people. When it is so contextualized that it ratifies the values and beliefs of a culture and ceases to be prophetic, it is no longer the Gospel but civil religion.

Bible and Culture

The realization in missions that the Gospel must always be expressed within cultural forms has led to a growing awareness that God's revelation in the Bible was also expressed in a particular set of cultural contexts. What, then, of the Bible is the unchanging essence of the revelation, what was God's application of this revelation to a particular people in a specific historical and cultural situation, and what was the Jewish cultural context

within which God acted? Moreover, was God's response to the Israelite culture basically neutral? Or was he preparing throughout the Old Testament a culture that could become an adequate vehicle of his self-revelation?

Cross-cultural missions has raised for theologians the critical questions of what is the essence of the Gospel, and how does it relate to human cultures. Again the incarnation may provide us with some analogies, for while Christ became fully human, he did so while retaining his full divinity. Furthermore, these two natures no not appear to be separated into two discrete compartments of Christ's existence in some type of ontological schizophrenia. Rather there is a dynamic interaction between these natures within the one God-Man.

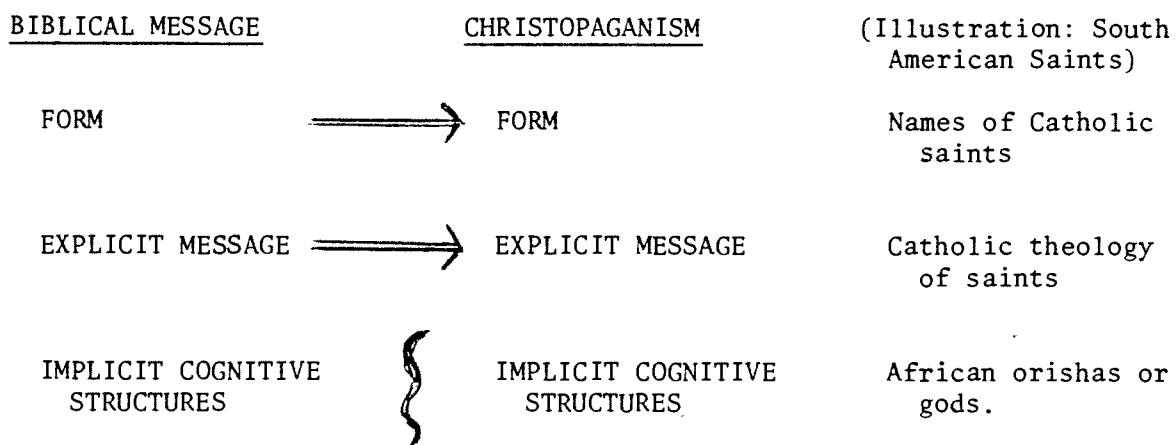
III. CONTEXTUALIZATION AND SYNCRETISM

A third area in which missions is raising profound theological questions has to do with the essential structure underlying the message of the Gospel. The explicit message is fairly clear. God spoke in the Old Testament to such people as Abraham, Moses, Deborah and David. Later He spoke through His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of humankind, rose from the grave and ascended to heaven. The Bible is a historical record of these acts of God, and their meaning has been explicated in formal creeds. There have been debates over specific interpretations of the Biblical record and the consequent creeds, but the questions of orthodoxy and heresy have dealt largely with explicit beliefs.

Confronted by cultural variance, missions have become aware of the fact that beneath explicit belief systems lie implicit and unexamined conceptual presuppositions about the nature of ~~the~~ world, and these presuppositions are theologically neutral. In other words, at the core of each culture are a set of fundamental "givens" - "a world view" - that determines the way people in that culture perceive the world. These givens include existential assumptions about the ultimate nature of reality, and normative assumptions about the nature of good and evil. Because world view structures are, for the most part, implicit and taken for granted, the missionary is often unaware of them. Consequently he or she communicates the Gospel in terms of explicit beliefs, unaware that the very categories within which the Gospel is expressed vary from culture to culture. The result is frequently Christopaganism in which there is an appearance of orthodoxy on the surface, but syncretism at the core (see figure 1).

FIGURE 1

Syncretism is Often the Expression of Christian Forms and Messages
in Implicit Antichristian Cognitive Structures



The theological issues involved in determining the essential meaning of the Gospel on the level of world view or deep structure, and of contextualizing it in other world views without syncretism can best be handled by means of several illustrations.

Structure of Time

It is natural to assume that all people live within the same framework of time. People in all parts of the world have seasons and years, days and nights, hours, minutes and seconds. To be sure, they call these by different names or they may even divide the day into different units of time, but for all time passes by a uniform rate and never returns. Intrinsic to this uniform, linear view of time are the questions of beginning and end (see figure 2).

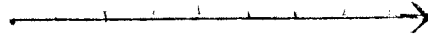
Analysis has shown that this modern scientific view of time is highly artificial (cf. Whitehead, 1961), and is not found in most of the world's cultures. Psychologically, we do not perceive time to pass at a uniform rate. Dull lectures seem endless, and exciting moments pass before we know it. Moreover, time seems to pass more quickly the older we get. Furthermore, we commonly experience the repetition of certain events. Day follows night, and night follows day in an unending cycle. Summer is followed by fall, winter, and spring, only to return back to summer. In some ways the second summer is different from the first, in some ways it is the same. Finally, it is difficult to show that scientific views of time fit the "real world" more closely than other views of time. Time does not exist in the real world. It is a cultural construct.

FIGURE 2.

World Views of Time

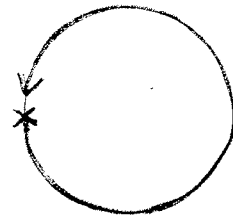
1. UNIFORM LINEAR TIME:

- a definite beginning and end
- all moments of equal duration and value
- nonrepetitive



2. CYCLICAL TIME:

- repetitive
- no beginning or end, infinite regression
- renewal by returning to origin, a "recreation" or "rebirth"



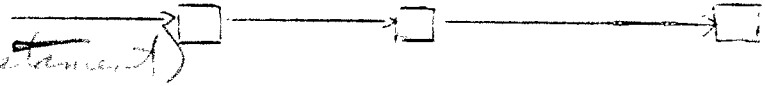
3. PENDULAR TIME:

- periodic movements, cusps when time stops
- time reversal
- no ultimate beginning or end, infinite regression



4. CRITICAL EVENT TIME:

- linear time
- definite beginning and end
- time of unequal importance and/or duration
- movement towards periods of crisis, decision or critical time event.



5. *aimlessness (Person Time) realization
out of time or history, thus actual
eternal now*

13a

the "already" and the "not yet"

A second and very widespread view of time is that it is cyclical. In cultures with cyclical time, similarities rather than differences between repeated experiences are stressed (see figure 2). Beginning and end are no longer so pressing, for both can be removed by infinite regression. Moreover, the original creation is endlessly repeated in the destruction and recreation of the world and of life. This recreation is not a new creation, but a reenactment of the original creation again and again.

A third view of time is pendular (see figure 2). Time oscillates between two poles; moving first in one direction, then stopping, then reversing itself (cf. Leach 1979:). The idea of time stopping is foreign to western thought, except, possibly, in the sacred moment.

A fourth view is critical event time, a view found in the Old Testament. Like scientific time, this is linear, but unlike scientific time, it is of unequal importance or duration (see figure 2). Ordinary time is preparation for the moment of crisis, of decision or of action (cf. Esther 4:14). Or ordinary time is secular time which is semi-chaotic, concerned with temporal affairs and changing, and stands in contrast to sacred time which is ordered, eternal and unchanging. Here again, origins and destiny become cardinal structural questions.

The theological question raised by this variance in world views is, "Is the Gospel tied to one of these views of time or can it be expressed in several or all of them?" Is the message of the Bible in part that time is, in fact, linear, or that it is of unequal importance? There are many who would argue that the Biblical message cannot be placed into cyclical or pendular views of time without syncretism or loss of essential meaning. A similar argument might be made that our shift to uniform linear time has played an important role in the secularization of contemporary

societies. The sense of the sacred is perceived only by setting it off from the secular, and if all time is equal, all of it is secular. If that is true, is the modern western church caught up in its own form of heresy?

or maybe it is all sacred? - to the Christian

Closely related to views of time are cultural myths. Unlike popular usage that treats "myth" as fictitious, we use the term here as it is used in contemporary studies of religion, namely as a "'true story' ... that is a most precious possession because it is ~~shared~~ sacred, exemplary, significant ... Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in Primordial Time." (Eliade 1963: 1,5).

One myth common in tribal religions is that of perfect creation-degeneration-destruction-recreation (see figure 3). The awareness of present suffering and sin is explained by a fall from some pristine state. They can be eliminated only with the destruction of the present world, and a recreation of the universe. But this recreation only reenacts the original creation and again the earth degenerates into evil and sorrow. The cycle must be endlessly repeated.

A second myth is that of creation-degeneration-destruction-new creation. Here, unlike the first myth, the new creation is not a recapitulation of the original creation, but a creation that restores the universe to a perfect state for ever. There is no further degeneration.

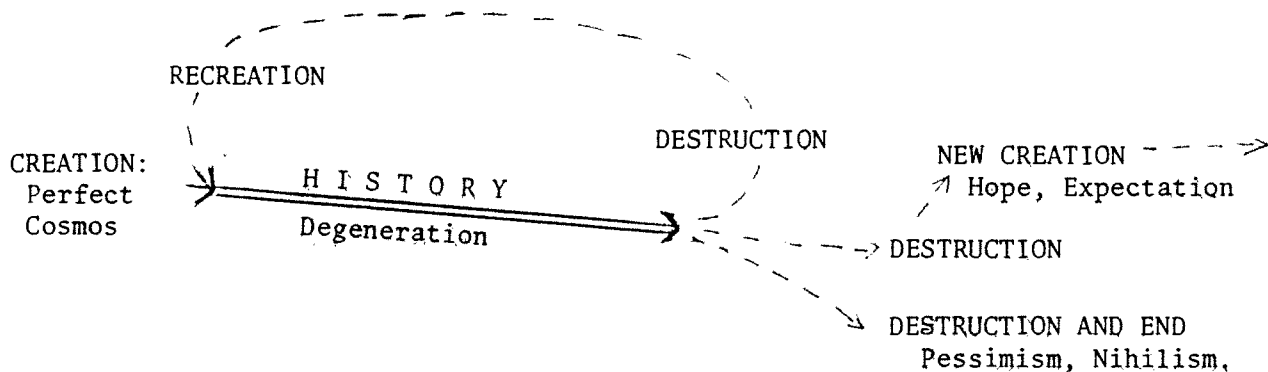
A third myth is that of creation-degeneration-destruction-end. This view of universal history is essentially pessimistic and nihilistic. As ^{etzsche} Nietzsche and Russell well understood, the introduction of a final end to the universe renders the present essentially meaningless.

A fourth myth is that of chaotic creation-evolution-perfect state. A variant is creation-evolution-decline-destruction-final end. The first of these is based on a notion of "progress" in history.

FIGURE 3

Common Time Myths or Temporal Paradigms

1. Degeneration Themes:



2. Progress Themes.



The theological question is which of these myths can be used to convey the truths of scriptures? The early church preached the second. Christ's return and the destruction of this world would precede the new age of heaven and eternal bliss. Moreover many, if not most, churches born in new cultural contexts, such as in Africa, the South Sea Islands and now in South East Asia are millenarian in character. After the conversion of Constantine, the church took a more positive view of the powers and blessings of this world, and began to advocate the fourth myth, namely that of divine activity in human progress. As Eliade points out, (1963: 67-68):

After becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity condemned millennialism as heretical, although illustrious Fathers had professed it in the past. But the Church had accepted History, and the eschaton was no longer the imminent event that it had been during the persecutions. The World - this world below, with all its sins, injustices, and cruelties-continued. God alone knew the hour of the End of the World, and one thing seemed certain: the End was not near. With the triumph of the Church, the Kingdom of Heaven was already present on earth, and in a certain sense the old world had already been destroyed. In this official anti-millennialism of the Church we recognize the first manifestation of the doctrine of progress.

But has the western church in some sense sold out part of the Gospel when it abandoned a strong millenarian view of history? Or can divine revelation be communicated without essential loss in both of these mythical forms? And can the Biblical message be translated into cultures and languages that assume the *second?* first or third of these mythical forms without calling these forms into question? In other words can the Gospel be contextualized in a cyclical or nihilistic world view? My personal conviction is that it cannot. At this point the Gospel must become prophetic and change the fundamental assumptions of the culture.

Cognitive Maps

A second example of the theological problems raised by world view studies is that of cognitive maps - the mental categories and domains people use to order their world. All people create categories, but the contents of these vary greatly from culture to culture. Moreover, people group these categories into cognitive domains, putting together things they consider to be of the same general "kind", but these too, differ from culture to culture. The fact that no two peoples order their worlds in exactly the same way means that it is impossible to translate directly from one language to another without some loss of meaning, and without adding some extraneous meaning (see figure 4).

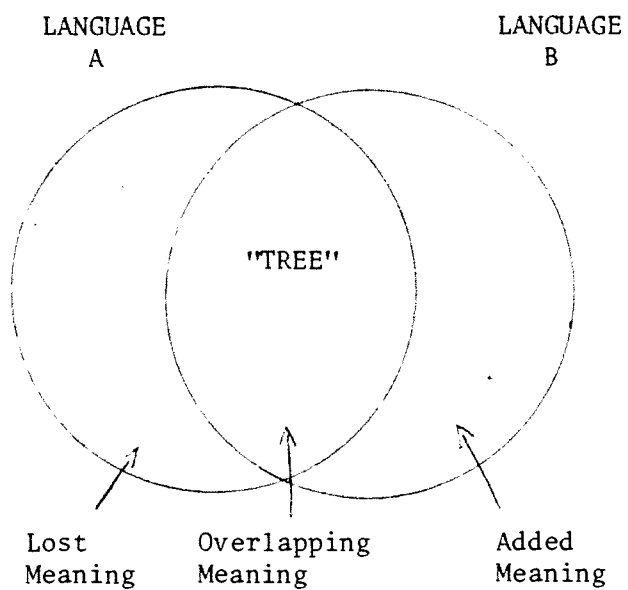
This problem of semantic noncongruence can be illustrated by looking at the domain of "life" in English and in Telugu, a South Indian language. In English we have a number of words for different kinds of life. These include words such as God, deer, tree, woman, fly, angel, cow, man, demon and bush. These we arrange into larger categories. Most westerners lump God, angels and demons together as "supernatural" beings. They put woman, man, boy and girl together as "human beings"; cows, deer, dogs and cats together as "animals"; and bushes, trees and flowers together as "plants". Rocks, sand and earth they lump together as "inanimate" objects. They are not quite sure where to place virus and bacteria.

Each of these larger categories represent, for the westerner, a different kind of life. Supernatural beings are invisible. They may visit the earth, but their ultimate abode is another world, a heaven or hell. Humans, on the other hand, should not be confused with God. To do so is sacrilegious.

Despite the theories of evolution, human beings are seen as fundamentally different from animals. It is not a crime to enslave, or to kill and eat

FIGURE 4

Noncongruency of Categories in Two Cultures Produces Loss in Original Meaning and Addition of Exteraneous Meaning Whenever Translation Occurs



animals, but it is to do so to humans. Moreover, many believe humans have souls but animals do not. Animal life is differentiated from plant life. Animals are normally credited with feelings and are thought to move around and eat plants. Plants, on the other hand, "do not eat animals." This is why plants that eat insects or frogs confuse us for they do not fit our categories. Finally, below this hierarchy of life is the category of inanimate matter (see figure 5*b*).

South Indian Telugu speakers perceive life in quite a different way. One of the fundamental premises of Indian thought is that all life is of one kind. There is no difference in the kind of life found in gods, humans, animals and plants, only a difference in the quantity of life they have. Gods rank higher than humans because they have more life, but they are not categorically different from humans. Similarly, humans have more life than animals, but both share the same kind of life (see figure 5*a*).

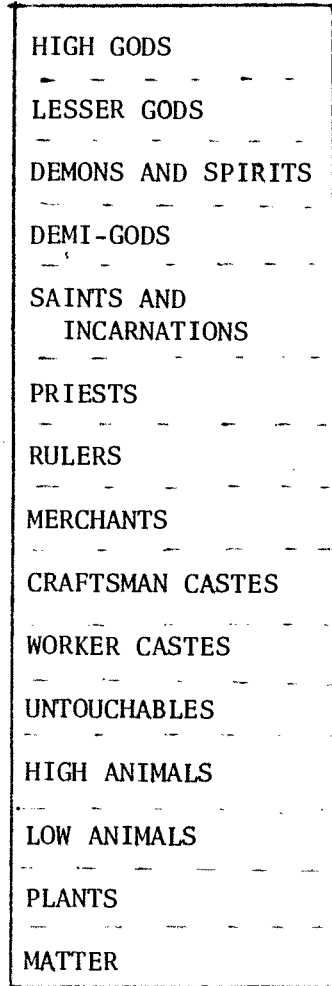
Given this view point, one can understand why orthodox Hindus refuse to kill higher animals such as cows. Cows share the same life as humans, and rank only a half step below them. To eat beef borders on cannibalism. Similarly, one can understand why Hindus make no sharp distinction between gods and humans. Saints such as Mahatma Gandhi and J.F. Kennedy are worshipped along side deities such as Krishna, and, in fact, are often thought of to be incarnations of a god.

The theological problem arises when one seeks to communicate the Gospel in Telugu. "In the beginning God...", by the fourth word in English and we run into difficulties. What Telugu word should we use for "God"? The general term in Telugu is devudu, and, in fact, this is the word used in Telugu translations of the Bible for "God". But careful semantic analysis shows that devudu carries the Indian connotations of god who is the same

INDIAN VIEW OF LIFE

BRAHMAN

Reality
Illusion



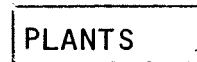
Pure Spirit

Pure Matter

AMERICAN VIEW OF LIFE

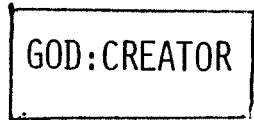


Supernatural
- religion
- unseen
- miracles
- faith
- prayer

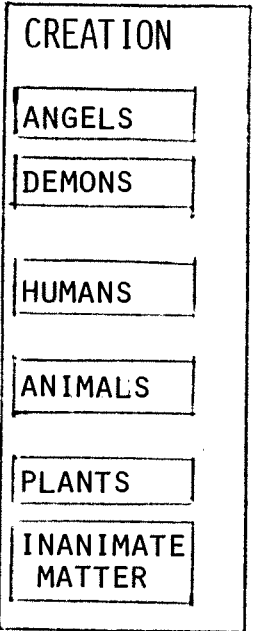


Natural
- science
- seen
- natural laws
- direct experience
- technology and control

OLD TESTAMENT VIEW OF LIFE



Eternal
Infinite
Other



Temporal
Finite

INDIAN, AMERICAN AND OLD TESTAMENT VIEWS OF LIFE

FIGURE 5

as human beings, only greater, and who, like humans, sins and may be reborn as an animal or ant. The concept of "incarnation" now means only the help given by the high ranked beings to their low ranked kinsmen. Devandlu come to earth frequently to aid their human followers. Is the term devudu adequate, then, to communicate the Biblical concept of God? Or does its use threaten to introduce a fundamental syncretism in the understanding of the Gospel? One might try other Telugu words such as parameshvarudu, ishvarudu or bhagavanthudu. The problem is, all of these have similar connotations. There is not word in Telugu that conveys the categorical otherness of God as creator with the possible exception of Brahman, but Brahman is an impersonal force and not a personal being.

Is it possible for a villager with an Indian world view to become a Christian without changing his or her fundamentally Hindu world view? Undoubtedly so, for world views are not changed over night, nor, for that matter, after long instruction. World views are implicit within the language and within the culture and are constantly reinforced in everyday life. Even when people migrate to other lands and learn new languages, it often takes generations before old world views are totally replaced. To say a villager cannot become a Christian without a conversion to a fully Christian world view is to say that Indians cannot become Christians without a restructuring of their language and culture, and without generations of explicit world view instruction.

On the other hand, can the church in India develop spiritual maturity and theological orthodoxy without coming to grips with the world view of its culture? So long as the assumptions of that world view remain implicit and unexamined, is there not a danger of syncretism? The question here is not of specific individuals, but of the church as a corporate body.

But if the Church in India must critique its cultural context theologically, the same is true of the church in the west. The western tendency to lump God, angels, and demons together as "supernatural beings" which belong to the purview of religion and theology, and to distinguish them from "natural beings" that can be studied scientifically is not Biblical. If there is a fundamental categorical distinction to be found in the Bible, it is that between God and his creation. Angels and demons are closer to humans than they are to God (see figure 35). It is for this reason that spirits and angels seem to appear so naturally within the experiences of people in the Old and New Testaments. Is then the western world view "heresy" within the allowable variations from the biblical norms, or is it a form of syncretism that places it outside the pale of Christian orthodoxy?

Sets and Fuzzy Sets

A third, and even more fundamental problem has to do not with what categories we create and what relationship they have to each other, but how we create categories per se. People in western cultures basically create their categories along the lines of modern set theory. The nouns that make up the fundamental building blocks of their world are words like "apples," "oranges," "pencils," and "pens." Each of these categories is a "clear" set and like all sets in "new math" they share certain common characteristics:

(1) A clear set is created by listing the essential or definitive characteristics an object must have to be within the set. For example, an apple is (a) a kind of "fruit" that is (b) firm, (c) fleshy, (d) somewhat round, and so on. Any fruit that meets these requirements (assuming we have an adequate definition) is an "apple".

(2) The set is defined by a clear boundary. A fruit is either an apple

or it is not. It cannot be 70% apple and 30% pear. Most of the effort in defining the category is spent on defining and maintaining the boundary. In other words, not only must we say what an "apple" is, we must also clearly demarcate it from "oranges," "pears," and other objects in the same domain that are not "apples".

crabapple?

(3) Objects within a clear set are uniform in their essential characteristics. All apples are 100% apple. One is not more apple than another. Either a fruit is an apple or it is not. There may be different sizes, shapes and varieties, but they are all the same in that they are all apples. There is no variation implicit within the structuring of the category.

(4) Clear sets are basically static. If a fruit is an apple, it remains an apple whether it is green, ripe or rotten. The only change occurs when an apple ceases to be an apple (e.g. by being eaten), or when something like an orange is turned into an apple (something we cannot do). The big question, therefore, is whether an object is inside or outside the category. Once it is within, there ordinarily can be no change in its categorical status.

In recent years we have become aware of the fact that one can create sets in other ways, and that, in fact, people in other cultures use these other ways to create many of their most fundamental categories. What are some of these ways, and what theological issues do they raise?

organize

A Typology of Set Formation

In the mid 1960's Zaide (1965), Cohen (1966), Black (1963) and others began to develop the theory of "fuzzy sets". This, in fact, turned out to be a whole way of ordering the world, and has led to a second algebra that is different from modern algebra based on clear set theory. Fuzzy set theory has made us aware that people can create categories in a radically different

way, and anthropology is beginning to show us that, in fact, people in other cultures do so.

Fundamentally, the difference between clear sets and fuzzy sets is that in clear sets, objects are either inside or outside the set (Mathematically speaking $X: X=0,1$), while in fuzzy sets there are degrees of inclusion ($X: X=0 \rightarrow 1$). In other words, an object may be 30% in, 50% in or 80% in the set. For instance, it is not hard to determine what is mountain and what is plains, but it is impossible to draw an exact line where the plains end and the mountains begin. There is a "fuzzy" boundary in which "plainness" decreases and "mountainness" increases.

foothills

The difference between clear and fuzzy sets can be understood by way of illustration. In the west, with its penchant for use of clear sets, a sharp distinction is made between the ethnic categories "white", "black," "red," and so on. All people are placed in one ethnic group or another, and there is no overlap between groups (see figure (a)). In fuzzy set thinking the distinction between "whites" and "blacks" is not so sharp. Some blacks have eight black great-grand parents. Some have seven black great-grand parents and one white great-grand parent. Some have six black great-grand parents and two white great-grand parents, and so on. Those who are three-quarters black are one-quarter white. Those who are one quarter black and three-quarters white (see figure (b)). While fuzzy set thinking draws no "either-or" boundary between races, clear set thinking does. In the U.S. in the past a man was classified as "black" if any ancestor was known to be black. Those one-quarter black and three-quarters white were classified as "black" and called "quadroons." Those one-eighth black and seven-eighth white were treated as "blacks" and called "octoroons."

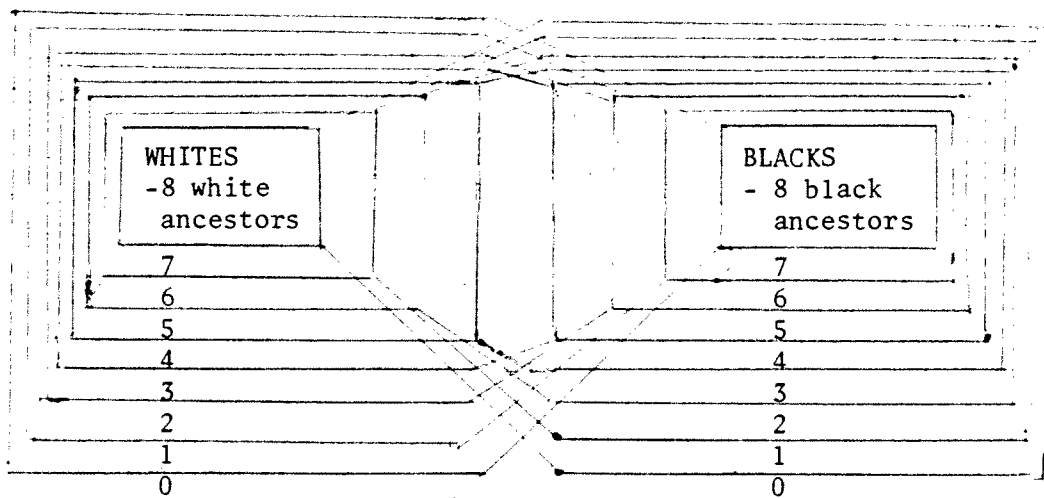
FIGURE 6

Perception of Ethnic Groups in Clear and Fuzzy Set Terms

ETHNICITY: CLEAR SETS



ETHNICITY: FUZZY SETS



The American culture is organized basically in terms of clear sets. The edges of roads are clearly marked by curbs or changes in surfacing materials. Lanes are delineated by painted lines. On week-ends around the country men are reestablishing the clearly bounded categories of their yards - edging the lawns, getting the ivy off the sidewalks, pulling the grass out of flower plots and scraping the paint off of windows. Women separate knives from forks and spoons, plates from pots and pans, and dark clothes from light ones for the laundry. In classical music there are clear intervals between notes, and "staying on pitch" is a virtue.

sexist analogy

However, the American culture does make use of fuzzy sets. While nouns are normally perceived as clear sets, most adjectives and adverbs are fuzzy sets. A cake may be "sweet," "sweeter," or "sweetest," a car may drive "fast," or "faster." In other words, there are degrees of sweetness and fastness. But these fuzzy sets are used mainly to modify a world organized in clear set terms. The shopper asks for an "apple" and modifies this with an adjective, "ripe."

The Indian culture appears to be organized more in terms of fuzzy sets. While the central portion of the road is clear, there is often a region of decreasing navigability on either side before one reaches the field or building. There are few curbs and lane markers, and even these can be ignored if need be for the sake of movement. In music there is a scale, but there are sixty-four steps between one note and the next (e.g. between C and D on the scale). The true artist can play three-sixty fourths above the note to produce the desired effect, and glide and slide are the hall marks of Indian music. The shopper asks for a "ripe" and when asked what kind of "ripe", he says, "an apple ripe".

Theological problems emerge when we begin to talk about the "Christian" or the "church". In clear set thinking, a person is either a Christian or not a Christian. He is either in the church or out of the church. In fuzzy set thinking it makes sense to say he is two-thirds Christian and one-third Hindu, or that he can participate in both a Christian church and a Hindu temple, just as he goes to both a western doctor and a village magician at the same time for healing. Again the question arises, does the Bible take an intrinsically clear set view of the world, and if so, is this essential to the Gospel message? Personally, I believe that there is a clear either-or-ness to the Lordship of Christ, that God who knows the hearts of humans, knows who are his. On the other hand, given the limitations of my human perception, I often find myself in a fuzzy set view of the church. There are some who I believe are truly committed Christians, and some who explicitly reject Jesus Christ. But there are many who seem to be somewhere in between. But this fuzziness is due, I believe, not to their ontological status but to my inability to see into the hearts of people. However, to say that ontologically "Christian" and "church" are fuzzy sets is to me a form of syncretism that undermines the essence of the Gospel. This means that in "fuzzy set societies" we must deal with the theological implications of their world view, and seek to change it, at least where it relates to the Gospel message.

There is a second distinction that must be made, namely a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic sets. The distinction has to do with the basis upon which categories are formed. Intrinsic sets are defined on the basis of the intrinsic characteristics of things in themselves. For example, an apple is an apple because of what it is. On the other hand extrinsic sets are defined by the relationship of objects to some external reference

point or center. For instance, a "husband" is a man married to a woman, and the geographic location "40° N, 30° W" is 40° north of the equator and 30° west of the prime meridian that passes through Greenwich, England.

The intersection of clear and fuzzy sets with intrinsic and extrinsic sets creates a four fold typology of ways to create sets (see figure 7). Each of these four types has certain structural characteristics.

1. Clear-intrinsic sets (see figure 8)

- a. The set is defined in terms of certain essential or definitive characteristics intrinsic to the objects themselves. Objects either have or do not have these characteristics. There is no position in between in which objects have varying degrees of these characteristics. Clear-intrinsic sets follow the "law of the excluded middle."
- b. The set is determined by a clear boundary. A clear distinction is made between objects inside and those outside the category. If the boundary breaks down, the category disappears. Consequently boundary maintenance is crucial to the existence of the category.
- c. Elements with the set are uniform and homogeneous. In other words, no structural distinction is made between members of the set. For instance, all oranges are fully oranges.
- d. The set is basically static. The only change that can occur is when things change in their intrinsic nature - in what they are in themselves.

2. Clear-extrinsic sets (see figure 9)

- a. The set is created by defining a center of frame of reference and the relationship of things to that center or frame of reference. In a "centered" set some things may be far from the center, but are related to or moving towards the center; therefore, they are

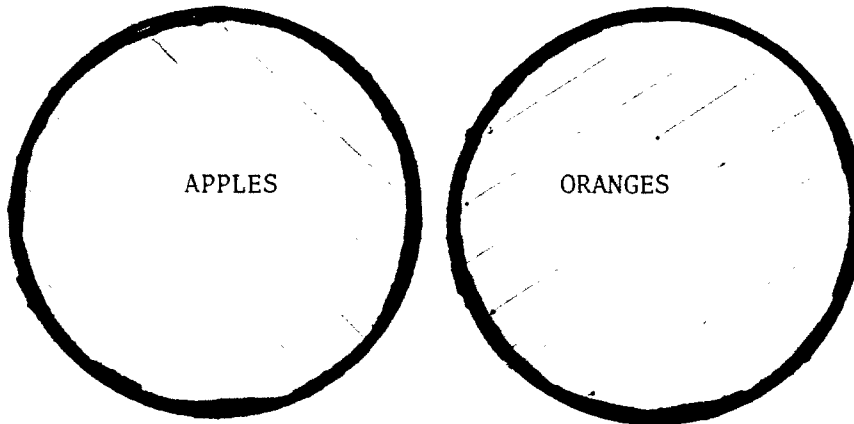
FIGURE 7

A Taxonomy of Sets

	CLEAR	FUZZY
INTRINSIC OR ESSENTIAL	<p>"BOUNDED" SETS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -defined on the basis of essence of members. -clear boundary, law of excluded middle. -variability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a)membership 0,1 (+,-). b)relationship 0,1. 	<p>"FUZZY SETS"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -defined on the basis of essence of members. -fuzzy boundary, no law of excluded middle. -variability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a)membership $0 \leftrightarrow 1$. b)relationship 0,1.
EXTRINSIC OR RELATIONAL	<p>"CENTERED" SETS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -defined on the basis of relationship to a reference point or frame. -clear boundary, law of excluded middle. -variability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a)membership 0,1. b)relationship $0 \leftrightarrow 1$. 	<p>"FUZZY CENTERED SETS"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -defined on the basis of relationship to a reference point or frame. -fuzzy boundary, no law excluded middle. -variability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a)membership $0 \leftrightarrow 1$. b)relationship $0 \leftrightarrow 1$.

figure 1

CLEAR-INTRINSIC ("BOUNDED") SETS

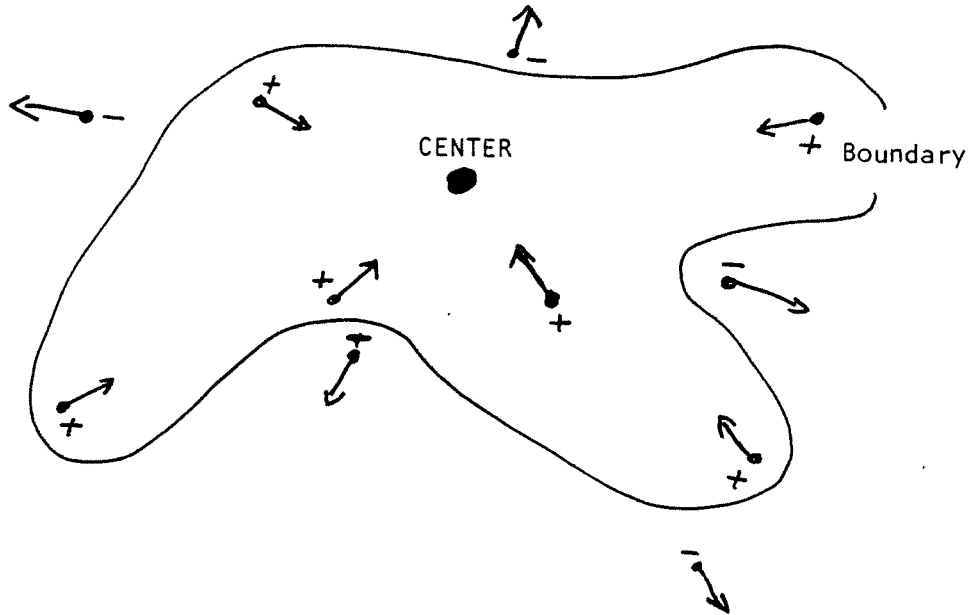


- defined in terms of definitive characteristics intrinsic to (of the essence of) things in themselves.
- boundary central to the existence of the set, therefore boundary maintenance processes very important.
- clear boundaries, therefore either/or thinking.
- homogeneous or uniformitarian view of set members. All are seen as essentially equal.
- basically static. Only change is in the essence of objects, from out to in, or in to out (0,1). (Relationships are not part of the set structure. To the extent one speaks of them they are present or absent: 0,1).

(Paul Hiebert 1982-b:25b)

figure 2

CLEAR-EXTRINSIC ("CENTERED") SETS



- defined in terms of relationship to a reference point or structure.
- center essential to the existence of the set, therefore stress on maintaining the center. Boundary emerges on the self selectivity of the response of things to the center. Consequently boundary maintenance less important.
- clear boundaries, therefore either/or thinking.
- dynamic view of relationships. Members not equally close to the center, but changing in their relationship to the center.
- basically a dynamic model. Two types of change are recognized: a) change in direction (0,1), and b) changes in distance from the center (0 \rightarrow 1).

(Paul Hiebert 1982-b:25c)

part of the set. On the other hand, some objects may be near the center, but moving away from it; so they are not a part of the set. The set is made up of all objects moving towards the center. For example, in a field of particles, all electrons are attracted by a positive electromagnetic pole and positrons[?] are repelled by it.

- b. While the set is created by its center or frame of reference, there is a clear boundary. In a centered set an object is either related to the center or it is not. But because the set is not defined on the basis of the boundary, boundary maintenance becomes less important. Rather, the boundary emerges when the center is defined and the relationship of the objects to that center determined.
- c. There are ^{AK} variations within the category. While there is a clear distinction between things moving in and those moving out, the objects within the set are not categorically uniform. Some may be near the center and others far from it, even though all are attracted to or moving towards the center. There is no single common uniformity within the category. For instance, two ships may be sailing to New York, but one is 100 miles from port and the other 500 miles.
- d. Clear-extrinsic sets tend to be more dynamic in character. Changes can occur both in the nature of the relationship to the center - positive or negative; and in the closeness of that relationship (distance from the center). In polygynous societies, for example, a distinction is made between first, second and third wife.

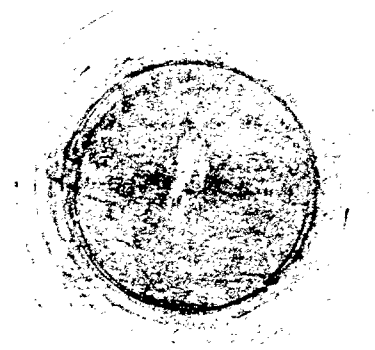
3. Fuzzy-intrinsic sets (see figure 10):

- a. The set is defined by the degree things possess definitive characteristics of the set. Membership in the set is based upon the intrinsic character of the things themselves.
- b. The boundary is fuzzy, hence the law of the excluded middle does not hold. A thing may belong to two or more sets within the same domain.
- c. There are degrees of inclusion within the set. Some things are 100% in, others 90% in, 80% in and so on. In technical terms, the fuzzy set is made up an infinite set of sets having from 0% to 100% of the definitive characteristics.
- d. Fuzzy-intrinsic sets have only one form of change inherent to them, namely change in the intrinsic nature of things themselves. In this sense, they tend to be more static in character.

4. Fuzzy-extrinsic sets (see figure 11):

- a. The set is defined by the relationship of thing to a center or frame of reference. However, unlike the clear-extrinsic set, the things can move in more than two directions - towards and away from the center. They may also move at various angles or even tangential to the center.
- b. There is a fuzzy boundary for things moving in the general direction of the center can be differentiated from those not doing so. ?
- c. There are two variables in fuzzy-extrinsic sets. First, there are differences in direction, and second, there are differences in distance from the center or reference point. Both must be specified in order to determine the relationship of a thing to the center.

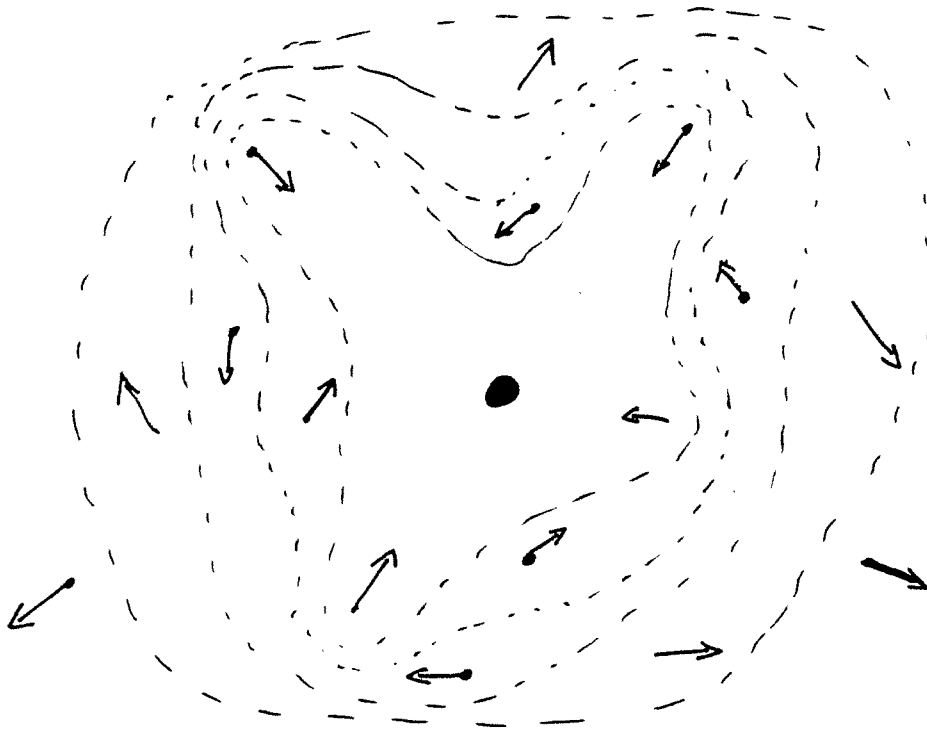
FIGURE 10
FUZZY-INTRINSIC ("FUZZY") SETS



- defined in terms of definitive characteristics intrinsic to (of the essence of) things in themselves.
- boundary essential to the existence of the set, therefore boundary maintenance processes important. However, fuzzy boundary makes this difficult. May have "stages" or a series of subboundaries marking entry to set.
- fuzzy boundaries, therefore both/and thinking.
- homogeneous or uniformitarian view of set members. But recognition of degrees of inclusion in set.
- dynamic along one direction. Recognition of degrees of membership ($0 \rightarrow 1$), or change in essence. (Relationships, if one can speak of them, are present or absent: 0,1).

FIGURE 11

FUZZY-EXTRINSIC ("FUZZY CENTERED") SETS



- defined in terms of a relationship to a reference point or structure.
- center essential to the existence of the set, therefore stress on maintaining the center. Boundary is fuzzy and emerges on the self selectivity of the response of things to the center. Consequently boundary maintenance is difficult and not stressed.
- fuzzy boundaries, therefore both/and thinking.
- dynamic along two directions. Recognition of degrees of membership in the set (0—1), or change in direction of relationship. Recognition, also, of degrees in closeness of relationship (0 — 1).

- d. Each of the variables can change. There can be change in direction, with a thing moving increasingly towards or away from the center. There can also be change in distance from the center.

Theological implications of set formation. Which of these four types of set formations should be used in Christian theology? Or, possibly the question is which type should be used where in theologizing. The problem involved can be seen by applying each of the four ways of creating categories to the categories "Christian" and "church". Each of these is an important mental set in theology, and the way we define them has important theological implications.

1. Christian and church as clear-intrinsic sets: What happens to our concept of "Christian" if we define it in terms of a "bounded set"(clear-intrinsic set)? Using the above characteristics we find that:

- a. We would define "Christian" in terms of a set of essential or definitive characteristics intrinsic to the person him or herself. Some theologians define these characteristics in terms of what the person believes (orthodoxy). For example, some define a Christian as a person who believes (holds within the mind and gives verbal acknowledgement to) a specific set of doctrines such as the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, and so on. Some make such lists quite long and add on specific doctrines of eschatology or soteriology. Others use behavioral practices (orthopraxy) to define the category. A Christian, then, is one who does not smoke or drink alcohol and so on. Still others use a set of beliefs and behavioral practices

to define a "Christian".

- b. We would make a clear distinction between a Christian and a non-Christian. There would be no position in between. Moreover, maintenance of this boundary is crucial to the maintenance of the category. Therefore it is essential that we determine who is a Christian and who is not, and that we keep the two categories sharply differentiated. We would want to make sure to include those who are truly Christian and to exclude as heretics those who claim to be Christians but are not. To have an unclear boundary is to undermine the very concept of "Christian" itself.
- c. We would view all Christians as essentially the same. There are old experienced Christians and young converts, but all are equal as Christians. We therefore would stress uniformity within the category.
- d. We would stress evangelism as the major task of Christians - getting people into the category. Moreover, we would see conversion as a single dramatic event - a crossing of the boundary between being a non-Christian and being a Christian. To do so, a person must acquire within himself or herself the defining characteristics which we discussed above. This crossing of the boundary is a conscious decision. Once a person is a Christian he or she is 100% Christian. There is within the structure of the category nothing more to acquire. A person may grow spiritually, but this is not an essential part of what it means to be a Christian.

How would "bounded set thinking" affect the way in which we organize the church and what we see to be its primary ministry?

- a. The church would consist of a uniform set of people who share a common set of characteristics. The result would be an egalitarian approach to church membership. There would be a tendency to give each church member an equal say in the running of the church, irregardless of their experience and Christian maturity. In this context the democratic procedures of voting make sense.
- b. The maintenance of clear membership boundaries is crucial. This is true not only for defining who is a Christian and who is not; it is also true organizationally. Voting only makes sense if one knows who has a right to vote. This demands that a church have a specific membership roll. A by-product of clear boundaries is the tendency to play "heretic games." In church politics some people may try to gain power advantages by branding an opponent a heretic. If this accusation is accepted by the institution, the opponent is put out of the church, and thereby rendered powerless. But even if the charge does not go so far, the person attacked is placed on the defensive and his or her power is undermined by suspicion.
- c. Leadership in an egalitarian institution is normally determined by ballot or public choice.
- d. The primary task of the church is to "expand the circle" - to increase the number of people within the church. Evangelism takes top priority and is perceived largely in terms of conversion.

Because there is no structural differentiation between members with regard to their level of spiritual maturity, nurturing ministries aimed at growth take a second place and are divorced from evangelism. Moreover, growth is not perceived in terms of definite structural stages.

- e. The primary danger in churches organized on the basis of bounded sets is "secularism", the absence of a center external to the group itself. As Durkheim points out, religion can become the worship by the people of their corporate group. Fellowship replaces worship as the central activity, and sin is defined in terms of group norms. In the church there is little symbolism pointing to the presence of God, and, in time, the awareness of that presence becomes dimmed.

2. "Christian" and "church" as clear-extrinsic ("centered") sets:

If we use centered set processes to define "Christian" and "church", they take on other faces, influenced, in part, by the structures inherent to clear-extrinsic sets.

- a. We would define a "Christian" in relational terms with regard to a person's God or center. A Christian is one for whom Christ is his Lord. The critical test would not be one of mental assent to a creed, or observance of a specifically defined set of practices, but one of an ongoing relationship to Christ: of allegiance, worship, obedience and discipleship. Is Christ his center? Moreover, beginning wherever he is, does he live his ^Alive within the framework of that relationship? Christians may arrive at different conclusions about certain beliefs and practices, but what is ^Qcrucial is that they arrive at their own understandings through honest obedience to the Lordship of Christ.

Because of the nature of the centered set it is clearly possible that some near the center may know a great deal about Christ, theology and the church, but be moving away from the center. These are the Pharisees. On the other hand, there are some who are at a distance - who know little about Christ - yet are Christians for they seek to follow Christ. He is the center around which their life revolves.

- b. From this perspective there is a clear division between being a Christian and not being a Christian. The boundary is there. But there is less stress on maintaining the boundary in order to preserve the existence and purity of the category, the body of believers. For example, baptism would be seen less as a certification of spiritual status and church membership given only after careful testing of the candidate's qualifications and more as an act and testimony of obedience offered without restraint to all who decide to become followers of Jesus.
- c. There would be a recognition of differences in spiritual maturity. Some are close to Christ in their knowledge and obedience, others have little knowledge and need to grow. But all are Christians and all are called to move ever closer to Christ. By recognizing variance, the centered set avoids the dilemma of cheap versus costly grace. In bounded set thinking, if one lowers the essential requirements for becoming a Christian so that those with no knowledge of Christ can become Christians without lengthy periods of training, the result is "cheap grace" and a carnal church. If, on the other hand, one raises the standards to build a pure church, the

result is "costly grace" that excludes many honest seekers from the Kingdom of God. In centered set or relational thinking, a person can become a Christian wherever he is in his spiritual knowledge or life by turning to Christ, but growth after conversion is an intrinsic part of what it means to be Christian. A Christian is not a finished product the moment he is converted.

- d. Two important dynamics would be recognized. First there is conversion, which in a centered set means that the person has turned around. He has left another center or god and has made Christ his center. This involves offering worship to Christ. It also involves discipleship or following after Christ in all of life. Conversion is a definite event, a change in the God in whom a person places his faith.

The second dynamic is movement from or towards the center. There is no static state. Conversion is not the end, it is the beginning. It is not the only important decision. It is only the first of many decisions made throughout life in response to Christ. Every decision moves a Christian towards Christ or slows him down. Life becomes a series of "conversions" in which new areas of life come under conviction and subordination to the control of Christ.

How would "centered set thinking" affect the way we view the church?

- a. We would recognize differences in spiritual gifts and maturity. Although everyone's voice would be heard, not all voices would carry equal weight. The word of the older, spiritually more

mature Christian would be given particular respect. As in India, ballot boxes might give way to councils of respected elders on whom the responsibility for the whole group would rest. They earn this respect by having shown themselves able to put aside their own self-interests and to serve the group.

- b. Because the church is not defined in terms of its boundaries, there would be less emphasis on maintaining strict membership roles. In fact, a number of stages of growth and participation might be recognized in addition to conversion that marks entry into the church such as beginner, experienced, elder and minister. It would be recognized that new converts have only a minimal knowledge of the gospel, that their lives may show no instant, radical changes in Biblical knowledge or behavior, but also that they can grow and learn, and be led to maturity because they are now committed to Christ. Some will eventually grow to become leaders of the church, others to minister with other gifts. Because the boundary is secondary to the center, there would be less need to exclude those not truly Christian. Rather, the emphasis would be on pointing to the center and strengthening people's commitment and obedience to Christ. Those who do not share that allegiance would in time, leave on their own. In a community of the committed, the nonseeker and uncommitted ^d do not feel at home.
- c. Leadership would be in the hands of mature leaders supported by group consensus. A person would lead not because he was elected by a majority, but because people turn to him for leadership in times of decision. Because the set is defined in terms of its center, the strength of the group would be measured by the

strength of its leadership. On the other hand, because maturation is a continuous process and all are involved, church leadership would not be categorically differentiated from the laity.

d. The primary task of the church would be to strengthen the center so that it might attract a following. By building a core of committed disciples, the church would establish a community and lifestyle that would draw people to it. Evangelism would spring out of the development of spiritual maturity in the lives of the believers.

e. The cardinal danger of centered sets is idolotry. Although Christ may remain the center in verbal affirmations, in reality some other god directs the people's lives. Or human leaders of the church place themselves rather than Christ at the center.

doctrines or theologies may become the center (pacifism)

3. "Christian" and "church" as fuzzy-intrinsic ("fuzzy") sets:

What would be the shape of "Christian" and "church" if we viewed them in fuzzy set terms? For the most part, they would be similar to those organized as bounded sets. The main difference would be the absence of sharp boundaries. Rather there would be a gradual shading from in to out. Applied specifically to the concept "Christian" we would tend to find the following characteristics:

a. As in bounded sets, we would define "Christian" in terms of a set of essential or definitive characteristics intrinsic to the person him or herself. These might be creedal, behavioral or a combination of the two. However, we would recognize degrees of Christianness. A person could be twenty percent

Christian, fifty percent Christian and so on.

- b. Because the boundary is fuzzy there would be not excluded middle. A person who is seventy percent Christian might remain thirty percent Hindu. While inviting people to be Christian, there would be no call for the people to make an either-or response to Christianity.
- c. There would be a recognition of variation among Christians, not on the basis of maturity, but on the extent to which people are truly Christian. Once people are fully Christian, they are the same. No variation in maturity is intrinsic to the set.
- d. Evangelism and getting people into the set would be our central task. But there would be no call for radical decisions that demands a rejection of the old. Conversion itself would be perceived as an evolutionary process.

How would the "church" look as a fuzzy set?

- a. Members would be seen as a group of people sharing in varying degrees a common set of intrinsic characteristics. These would be defined in terms of beliefs or practices.
- b. The boundary would be fuzzy, hence no one would be excluded. But there would be concern for boundary maintenance for without the boundary the church ceases to exist. There would be a recognition that entry is a process involving degrees of conversion rather than a decisive event.
- c. There would one type of variance, that from out to in. Once in, all Christians would be seen as uniform.
- d. Evangelism would be important, but its nature would be

seen as different from evangelism seen in clear set terms. There would be a recognition that conversion may involve a series of stages, and that in some of these the person becoming a Christian may participate in the activities of another religion.

- e. From a Christian perspective the cardinal danger inherent in "fuzzy set" churches are syncretism and religious relativism.

4. "Christian" and "church" as fuzzy-extrinsic ("fuzzy centered") sets:

The essential difference between centered and fuzzy centered sets has to do with the boundary. The theological implications are to exclude the sharp either-orness that sharp boundaries introduce.

With regard to the concept "Christian" this would mean:

- a. A Christian would be defined in terms of a center and his or her relationship to that center, rather than in terms of characteristics intrinsic to him or herself.
- b. The boundary between Christian and non-Christian would be fuzzy. In other words, there would be a recognition that turning from gods to Christ may involve a series of turnings, rather than a single turning around. Conversion would be seen as a process.

However it might be recognized that a person might move towards a center near but distinct from Christ, and therefore not be a Christian. For example a person might follow a great hero and become a better person without becoming a full follower of Christ.

- c. Two types of variation would be recognized. First there would be degrees of conversion. One might refer to some people as two-thirds Christian or three-quarters Christian. Second, there

would be degrees ^{of} maturity. Even after becoming fully Christian, growth or movement towards the center would be recognized. The two are not completely separable. Movement towards a center near Christ brings me closer to Christ himself.

- d. Two types of change would be recognized, conversion and maturation. Both of them would be seen as processes.

Finally, how would the "church" look in fuzzy centered set terms? Basically it would be the same as centered set churches, only the boundary would be fuzzy.

- a. We would recognize differences in degree of conversion as well as differences in spiritual gifts and maturity.
- b. Because the church has no clear boundary, there would be little emphasis recognized such as inquirer, seeker, converted, baptized, deacons and ministers, marking degrees of conversion and degrees of growth. Admission to each might be marked by a ritual used not to demonstrate exclusiveness, but progress and growth.
- c. Leadership would be vested in those who are fully Christian and mature. Differences in gifts would also be recognized for recognition of diversity is inherent to the category.
- d. The task of the church would be both to lead people through the stages of conversion and of maturity. Evangelism and discipling would be equally important. There would be less stress on maintaining boundaries and more on emphasizing the center. There would be less stress on acquiring certain characteristics and more on building relationships.
- e. The primary dangers inherent in "fuzzy set" churches are syncretism and theological relativism on the one hand, and worship of leaders near the center on the other.

If it is possible at the world view level to order the world in a number of different ways, each having different theological implications, the questions arise, which of these is more Biblical, which are within the permissible range of Christian theology, and which are inherently unChristian in their assumptions? Probably the questions go deeper than that: which of these ways of creating categories should be used where in theological thought? Which of the great many theological concepts such as God, conversion, grace, love and sanctification should we define in bounded set terms, in centered set terms, in fuzzy set terms or in fuzzy centered set terms? And does one's perspective make a difference - does God see things with a clarity we do not?

Questions raised by world view differences are only now emerging. To provide theological responses, we will need to develop not only a Christian soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology, but also Christian theologies of time, space, ancestors, animals, plants, misfortunes (individual, societal and cosmic), and guidance for uncertain futures. We will need, also to examine the range of world views within which an authentic Christianity can be expressed, as well as the world view assumptions that are antithetical to Christian theology.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In the past two centuries, the emergence of natural sciences has raised important theological questions, and challenges to traditional theological interpretations of the Bible. Physics and astronomy questioned the geocentric view of the world, and chemistry and biology the nature and origins of human life. Today the emergence of the social sciences is raising an even more difficult set of questions that will have an even greater impact on theology in the coming decades. For the most part these have to do with the nature of human beings, their knowledge and their cultures. To ignore these questions or to give simplistic theological answers to them in order to "play it safe" in the long run will leave the Church in the back eddies of modern thought, a survival of the past. Rather we must face these questions head on and find a truly Christian response to them that takes seriously, though not uncritically, what the sciences have learned about the world of God's creation. If God is indeed the creator of humankind as well as the author of divine revelation, our understanding of the two will in the end not be contradictory but complementary.

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